1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33) 1936 SR9 Carib SR9

THE BARAMA RIVER CARIBS OF BRITISH GUIANA

SUSTENANCE

LIFE on the Barama, unlike that reported from certain other tropical environments, cannot be supported by so simple a means as merely plucking the fruits which a bountiful nature places within easy reach of the hand of man. The jungle yields no vegetable products which are or can be used as a staple human diet; and the animals which inhabit the bush have a wary way of eluding unskillful hunters. Likewise the fish of the streams show an annoying liking for the water of their native habitats in preference to that of a cooking pot. The mere business of filling bellies, therefore, occupies a considerable amount of the time and effort of the Caribs, although rarely is this essential activity so demanding as to exclude all others or an enviable amount of leisure.

The fact that the Caribs are not celebrated in more sophisticated parts of the earth for their culinary accomplishments, with the possible exception of alleged anthropophagous delicacies formerly attributed to them, becomes intelligible after an intimate acquaintanceship with their methods of acquiring and preparing food. The diet, nevertheless, is fairly varied and, as can be said of almost any outlandish food, "is not disagreeable to the civilized palate" after said palate has passed a somewhat unappetizing apprenticeship. The one apparently serious omission from the menu is a regular and proper amount of "roughage," a lack which gives rise to a notable degree of constipation and stomach trouble among the natives.

The two staples which are absolutely essential to a Carib are meat (or fish) and cassava. They figure in practically every meal to such an extent that the other food products may almost be regarded as garnishings, while on long trips over the trail or on the river they are relied upon exclusively. The men of the family are responsible for the supply of meat and fish. To this end a man usually goes out hunting every few days, depending upon the meat stock which is in the house, and he stays out until he has

1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33) 1936 SR9 Carib SR9

something to bring back. No man will return from a hunting excursion empty handed to face the ridicule and anger of his wife; and as a consequence men are occasionally absent from their homes for two or three days, sleeping in the bush, until they have acquired some game, if nothing more than a turtle or a couple of birds' eggs, to bring back to the household. Under ordinary circumstances a man usually hunts alone with the help of a dog, although hunting parties are occasionally formed for the pursuit of drove animals, such as bush hog, or unwieldy beasts such as maipuri (bush cow). In fishing a man has his own private lines which he tends himself, but when a stream is poisoned, the cooperation of several men, and frequently of women and children, is enlisted.

The women of the household attend to the field products, digging the cassava and gathering the other edibles, as well as the cooking and preparation of all food. In these activities they are assisted by men too old to hunt and by young children. The cutting and preparation of the field, is, however, the man's task. And both the men and the women cooperate to do the planting.

Hunting. In the procuring of land animals, only three kinds of devices are used: the bow-and-arrow, the trap, and, rarely, the shot gun. Blow guns and spears are not in use at the present time, nor is there any memory of their former use by the Caribs. Such contrivances are said by the old men to have been used by the Akawai who formerly had settlements on the river and they are occasionally brought into the area as curiosities from distant Akawai settlements.[1]

Bows are made from four different kinds of wood and vary slightly according to the material. These four varieties are washiba (Carib, same; unidentified), letter wood (Carib, paidya; *Brosium aubletti*), bopa (Carib, same; unidentified), and yarriyarri (Carib, same, *Anaxagorea* sp.). The washiba bow in cross section is a fat oval; it is somewhat flatter on the belly than on the back and the wood is almost black. The letter wood bow has the same general

[1] Alec, for instance, says that when he was young his uncle brought a blow pipe home after he had made a trip to the head of the Cuyuni. There he had bought the weapon from the Akawais. It was made in one piece from a palm stem with the pith removed. His uncle gave him instructions concerning it. If you hit the quarry and it runs away, the poison is spoilt and the blow pipe must be thrown away. "This is because the game runs away with the essence of the poison" robbing the poison on your unused darts of its power and the weapon of its efficacy. To be successful you must try to hit the game two or three times and cut out the parts around the wounds.

1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33) 1936 SR9 Carib SR9

osity and rooted to the spot as if hypnotized by the call, while the hunter approached closer for a better shot. Arrows as well as powder and shot are valuable, and no hunter takes any unnecessary risk of losing or breaking his weapons.

After the animal has been killed it is trussed up with bush rope for carrying back to the settlement, which may be several hours' distance. The method of trussing varies with the species of animal, but each method is adapted to the species in question so as to make the easiest load possible under the circumstances. If the game is a large animal such as a deer or bush hog, it is disemboweled on the spot, and the parts which are desired cut out. Usually the four quarters and the teeth are taken. If there is a stream near, they are carried there and washed, after which they are trussed up for packing homeward. Smaller animals, such as birds and akuri, are cleaned after they arrive at the settlement. In case the hunter is traveling and he bags a large animal, he builds a fire and a babracote, or smoking frame, on which, before he proceeds on the journey, the meat is smoked after it has been cleaned. In this climate untreated meat spoils within twenty-four hours.

The traps in use on the Barama are the gun or arrow trap, the bird trap, and the noose trap for birds[1], the spring trap for rats (pandaki), and the labba trap.

Among the animal foods which are more or less regularly hunted and eaten are the following:

Accouri, or akuri (Carib, same; *Dasyprocta aguti*).
Labba (Carib, same; *Coelogenys*).
Armadillo (Carib, yesi).
Ant bear (Carib unknown to author; *Myrmecophaga*).
Bush hog: large (Carib, ponjo; *Dicotyles labiatus*); small (Carib, abuya; *D. torquatus*).
Deer of several varieties.[2]
Turtle of several varieties and their eggs.
Manati (Carib) or sea cow.
Wild honey.
River and land crabs.
Otters or water dogs. (?*Pterura Sambachii*).

[1] Roth, 1924, *An Introductory Study of the Arts, Crafts, and Customs*, Plate 41, Fig. 3, A. B, and C.
[2] Tibisiri (?*Cervus humilis*).

224 Bush cow (Carib, maipuri; *Tapir Americanus*).

136 Birds of the following varieties, particularly:

262 Powis or bush turkey (*Crax* sp.).
Mamm (tinamou).
Dukwaru or djokoro.
Wicissi ducks.
Cock of the Rock (Carib, unknown to author; *Rupicola elegans*).

Bird eggs (particularly mamm eggs).
Rats.

262 The tchiri, a white worm which lives in the pith inside the stem
136 of the turu tree, is fried on the cassava pan and eaten. The kom-
252 buru worm which lives in decaying wood is also eaten. The Caribs do not eat tiger, snake, camudi (water snakes), monkey, chicken hawk, or "crows" (vultures). Abstinence from these forms of animal food is based on tribal taste and has no religious significance.

Kushie ants are occasionally consumed. They are parched on
[825] the cassava pan and the abdomens are eaten. There is a long white worm which is always found in a kushie ant hill, called by the Indians two-headed, because the tail closely resembles the head. It is said to be the "mother of the ants," makoyumo (probably *Amphis baenae*). The muro frog, whose quacking sound is regarded as a sign of rain, is sometimes eaten and is said to taste like "young fowl."

The magico-religious beliefs and practices concerned with hunting will be taken up in the chapter on religion.

Methods of skinning the "accouri" are as follows: An incision is made from the neck to the sexual opening; branching incisions are then made to remove the hide of each of the legs; an incision is made encircling the neck; and the whole skin excluding that of the head is removed in one piece. The head is severed from the body, the abdominal cavity is opened by a sagittal incision in its anterior wall and the contents of the cavity are removed. The carcass is then dismembered for cooking. Essentially the same method is used for other fur or hair-bearing animals.

226 **Fishing.** European fish hooks are obtained in trade. If these
[177] are unavailable, hooks are made from common pins or from a
824 certain thorny bush of the jungle. Fish rods of yarriyarri (*Anaxa-*

bitter cassava, and baked into small balls which are dropped into the water where they are swallowed by the fish. A fish which has been gullible enough to swallow this fraud soon loses control and floats to the surface where it is captured by the fisherman.

I did not observe nor hear of the use of fish traps or of nets, although these appliances are reported from other parts of the colony.

The fish most commonly used for food are the haimara (*Hoplias macrophthalmus*), huri (*Hoplias malabaricus*), yarrau (*Hypostoma* sp.), low-low (*Silurus* sp.), pirai (*Pygocentrus*), cartabak (?*Tetragonopterus*). The moracot, so well known for its fighting tendencies and flavor in other parts of the colony, is found only in the tidewater portions of the Barama. Hook baits include spiders, calabash pap, cassava bread, and various worms.

Among other food products obtained from the streams are sting-ray (caught on hooks and tasting somewhat like tripe when cooked), small periwinkles or "snails" of two sizes called respectively mari (small) and kue (large), frog eggs.

Vegetable Foods. Every household has its own agricultural field lying at some distance from the house clearing. The slash-and-burn method is used in agriculture, a method which, in the absence of artificial fertilizers, requires the opening up of a new field usually every third year due to the exhaustion of the soil.

I do not intend here to enter into a detailed description of agricultural practices, inasmuch as similar procedures to those followed by the Caribs have been described by Roth, Schomburgk, Farabee, and others. When choosing a spot for a field, the first criterion is good drainage, and for this reason the fields are frequently referred to as "cassava hills." Associated with the topographical position in the problem of drainage is the character of the soil. The proper soil is called "white dirt" and takes its color from the large amount of sand mixed with the loam. First the underbush is cleared away with cutlasses and heaped into piles. Then the trees are cut down with iron axes obtained in trade. For felling large trees with heavily buttressed feet, scaffolds of small logs tied together with bush rope are built ten to fifteen feet above the ground, on which men may stand to do the chopping.

The tree felling is usually done during the rainy season and the movable logs and brush piled into heaps. Some time after the advent of the dry season, the logs and brush are burned, after

1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33)1936 SR9 Carib SR9

cassava cakes. The baked starch is called sipipya keipyo or mimyi. The preparation of cassiri and paiwari is described in the section on stimulants.

Plantains (parurune) of two varieties are grown in the fields. The aratan is comparatively small and is distinguished by the fact that the trunk of the tree is black. The taposa has a long thick fruit and a gray trunk. In planting, suckers are taken from the root, put in a hole made with the digging stick, and covered with earth; sometimes wood ashes are put in the bottom of the hole beforehand. The tree bears fruit about ten months later. Both men and women cooperate in the planting, although only men pick the fruit which is detached from the tree in large bunches like bananas. The fruit may be eaten raw when it is ripe, that is, when the outer skin is yellow. Both ripe and green plantains are boiled. Green roasted plantain is a great delicacy; the skin is removed and the fruit placed in the ashes of the fire; when finished it is split and spread with grease or gravy and eaten with the hands. Finally, the green plantain may be grated raw and baked into a thin cake on the cassava pan. A plantain leaf is laid on the pan before the moist mash is spread for baking. The leaf is also in constant use as wrapping material, to wrap cassava cakes, to cover loads in walishas (carrying baskets), and for all purposes in which wrapping material is required.

Bananas (paruru) are planted in the same way as plantains and bear in about the same length of time (ten months). Ten varieties are distinguished: the small red banana is called maripyemyu and bears early; the large yellow type is called idinyuku; the largest reddish banana (kyasakore), bears earliest of all the varieties, is black when ripe, and is used mostly for roasting; the large yellow variety is called wepyunsokai and ripens in the middle of the season; the small sour reddish banana, called "sour fig" by the creoles, is called sari arya by the Caribs and is distinguished from the maripyemyu by its tart flavor; the greenish type (ipitakamapo), known as the "apple banana" and the "Cayenne banana" to the creoles, is usually boiled; the black banana is called mekorumyo; the stubby green type is called mutuku; and the medium red variety rejoices in the name of pomere or pomede.

Four varieties of pineapple (nana)[1] are grown: kashûshipyopo,

[1] *Ananas sativa.*

1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33) 1936 SR9 Carib SR9

largest and juiciest; ekupu, slightly smaller than the preceding type; toshiare, long and thin, the sweetest of the four types; kuyarimyo, longer, thinner, and slightly sourer than toshiare. In planting, shoots are taken from the roots of mature plants and put in holes made in the ground with the digging stick. The plant bears in about a year after planting. The fruit is picked when it is yellow, and the skin removed with a knife. The fruit is mostly used to make an alcoholic drink called tanemu, the pulp being grated into a juicy mash and allowed to set for several days after having been mixed with water. Occasionally the ungrated fruit is eaten raw.

Three varieties of yams (napoi)[1] are known to the Caribs; apotononognapoi, the large white yam; tawimidididishye, the small white yam; tupununapoi, the purple yam. They may be planted at any time of year and ripen in ten to eleven months, i.e. when the leaves die. For food they are eaten boiled, after being peeled. A drink, napoishuru, is also made from yams, as described in the chapter on stimulants.

Tanyas and eddoes are also grown in the fields and are boiled in the pot after being peeled.

Sugar cane grows in every field. It is planted by inserting a shoot into a small hill of loose earth. It is eaten as a confection, being chewed like a stick of candy after the outside bark has been removed. The juice is also expressed in the cane mill (Plate 8, *b*) and used as an ingredient in cassiri and other alcoholic drinks.[2]

Two types of "punkin" or squash (wayoma) are to be found in Carib fields: apotono wayomo, large and spherical; takunshishe wayomo, long and thin, with flesh drier and of superior flavor. The squash is planted from seed and bears in three months. As soon as the fruit is ripe the seeds are planted again so that a relatively continuous supply will be on hand all the year around. The squash is eaten only boiled; it is never dried or made into bread or cake.

Maize (awashi) of red (kuwata) and white (tamuneng awashi) varieties is raised. The seed is planted in small hills made with the hoe. While still green, the corn may be roasted on the cob in the husks; the ear is simply stuck among the hot ashes of a fire. When ripe, the kernels are removed from the cob with the hands

[1] *Dioscorea* sp.

[2] For a discussion of the probable introduction of this type of cane mill by negroes and for its distribution in South America, see Nordenskiöld, 1930, *Modifications of Indian Culture through Inventions and Loans.*

1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33) 1936 SR9 Carib SR9

calabash are cultivated: a, apotonong kwa'yepwi, large, spherical in shape except for small "spout" near the stem, grows on ground vine; b, morutuku, long, like a water melon, grows on ground vine like a melon; c, pawa, small and elongated, grows on bush; d, shi'-iyongkwa'imyako epu, small and globular, grows on bush. Types a and b are planted from seed. They are perennial. Types c and d are planted from shoots cut from a living bush. The vines bear in seven months, the bush types in a year and a half. The pap from the inside of the fruit is sometimes used as fish bait and is sometimes cooked as a vegetable, but the principal use to which the fruits are put is in dried form as vessels for liquids. (See section on Utensils.) An interesting example of sympathetic magic is the practise of tying to the calabash plants the shells of the large landsnail, which in shape and color often resemble a small calabash. This practise is held to insure a good yield from the plant.

The cotton (maru'epu) trees are also planted near the houses. They are planted from seed and reach a height of eight to ten feet. They are said to bear in four to five months. Only one variety is grown. The seeds are removed by hand from the cotton bolls and are not used for any other purpose.

A large number of foods are gathered from the forest in season. The following is only a partial list of the edible bush products.

Plums (mope)[1] — bear once a year, about January; round and greenish in color; eaten raw and boiled.

Waiti — fruit in a pod like beans, grows on tree; seeds surrounded by sweet velvety meat; three varieties: paidyowa, long pod; posindyo, small short pod, grows along river banks; anakara, broad stubby pod. The seeds are sucked, but the fruit has little food value.

Asipoko — a round reddish fruit with soft tart flesh.

Arawiya — plum-like fruit.

Sawari nuts (*Caryocar* [*Pekea*] *tuberculosa*) — the Brazil nut of commerce.

Mora seed (*Dimorphandra mora Bth.*) — in times of scarcity grated and baked into bread, sometimes mixed with cassava.

Greenheart seed (*Nectandra rodioei Hooker*) — same use as mora seed.

Ballimanni seeds (?sp.) usually eaten by accouri and labba, but used by man in time of want.

Cashew nuts (*Anacardium sp.*).

The fruit of the kokerite palm (*Maximiliana regia*).

Fruit of the ite palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*).

[1] ?*Spondias lutea.*

1: Gillin E-5 (1932-33)1936 SR9 Carib SR9

The "cabbages," or fresh shoots, of several palms [1]
Akoyuru seed (*Astrocaryum tucuma*).
Arrow root (*Maranta indica, Miramoxissima*).

Such salt as is eaten nowadays is obtained in trade. Some of the older people, however, remember seeing leaves of certain trees burned and the ashes mixed with food as a condiment.

Cooking. The women of the household cook all food which is eaten at home, although men are able to prepare their own meals when unavoidably detained in the bush. The desire to have the women do the cooking, as well as the other pleasures of connubiality, accounts for the fact that a man going on a long journey will always attempt to have his wife accompany him.

Uncooked meat may be preserved by salting and by smoking over the fire.

Certain foods may be roasted in the ashes, others roasted on the end of a green stick, others baked on the pan, but the most universal way of preparing vegetables and meat is to make them into "pepper pot." In every Carib house a pot will be seen on the fire stones at almost any time of day. Meat and vegetables are cut into small pieces and put into the pot with water and a suitable amount of cashidipyo and set to boil. The cashidipyo lends a slightly acrid or peppery taste to the mess, somewhat like the flavor imparted by Worcestershire sauce.

No set times are observed for meals, although food is quite regularly taken upon arising and in the evening. Men and boys eat their fill from the pot alone, after which the females are allowed to stay their hunger with the remainder. One usually squats over the pot with a cake of cassava and a pot of peppers near by. One reaches into the pot with the bare hands and extracts a piece of meat or a vegetable which may be popped into the mouth or may be laid on a piece of cassava bread, which is bent over to make a sandwich. According to the dictates of personal taste a pepper may be included in the sandwich. If one desires the gravy in the bottom of the pot, one soaks a piece of cassava bread in it. When the pot is emptied more ingredients are added without cleaning out the pot. In this way there is always a supply of cooked food on hand, and the constant simmering keeps it from spoiling.

[1] ?*Oreodoxa, Areca oleracea, Euterpe oleracea.* See Schomburgk, 1922–23, *Travels in British Guiana*, Vol. I, p. 33.

241 field. Individuals have cut extensive fields to support their
*179 competition for the office of Amerindian captain. The impact of these
654 recent departures marked by the increased escape of energy from the
(622) local forest ecosystem as well as the deterioration of the exposed soil through laterialization at some point will impose limiting factors on the agricultural development of the area.

222 The forest flora which is gathered for food and other uses is to
824 some extent defined by individual knowledge. The identification as
• 262 well as the preparation are knowledge held by a limited number of
(463) people. For some fruits, nuts, and roots no commonly known name exists in the Carib language. This follows from the nature of the food quest. An individual is constantly searching out these vegetable foods during the course of his daily activities. Consequently, the list of forest flora foods must remain partial. Those recorded by Gillin and additions made by 1970-71 field work are presented in Table 2.

Faunal Resources

22 The faunal resources from the forest are recorded in Table 3.
262 Those reported by Gillin are presented first, then the current additions. As the 1970-71 list was collected in the air strip vicinity, the additions reflect a more careful scouring of the available foods as a result of a heavier concentration of population in one location. On an individual basis, taboos against eating monkey and tiger (Gillin 1936:10) have been abandoned. Also, this list cannot encompass the many sporadic and minute sources. A person

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 16]

2: Adams E-4,5 (1970-1971) 1973 SR9 Carib SR9
(1932-1971) Barama River

TABLE 2

FOREST FLORAL FOODS

222
262
137

1932-33

plums
Waiti, three varieties of fruit in pod-like beans
(Waikey, Iga splendens - present author's note)
Asipoko, round reddish fruit
Arawiya, a fruit
mora and greenheart seeds (Dimorphandra mora, Nectandra rodioei Hooker)
Ballimani seeds
cashew nuts (Anacardium sp.)
fruit of the Kokerite and Ite palms (Maximiliana regia, Mauritia flexuosa)
the "cabbages" or fresh shoots of several palms
Akoyuru seeds (Astrocaryum tucuma)
arrow root (Maranta indica, Miramosissima)
Brazil nut (Caryocar tuberculosa) (Gillin 1936:21-22).

1970-71 Additions

locust seeds (Hymenae acourbaril)
monkey pot (Lecythis davisii)
pimpler pear
Atupamu, fine red seed
Apotari, seed
Toro, nut
Semusemu, fruit
Calumedi, black seed
Turu, palm leaves for tea
Cawawi, a nut from a rope

2: Adams E-4,5 (1970-1971) 1973 SR9 Carib SR9
(1932-1971) Barama River

TABLE 3

FOREST FAUNAL FOODS

22
• 262
136

1932-33

accouri (Dasyprocta aguti)
labba (Coelogenys)
armadillo
ant bear (Myrmecopaga)
bush hog (Dicotyles labiatus, Dictotyles torquatus)
deer of several varieties
turtles of several varieties and their eggs
manati or sea cow
river and land crabs
otters or water dogs (?Pterura Sambachii)
bush cow (Tapir Americanus)
wild honey
birds
- Powis (Crax sp.)
- Mamm
- Dukwaru or Djokoro
- Wicissi ducks
- cock of the rock (Rupocola elegans)
- bird eggs

rats
Tchiri worms and Komburu worms
kushie ants
Muro frog, frog eggs
sting ray and snails of two varieties (Gillin 1936:9-10).

1970-71 Additions

kibihi
saki winki monkey
howler monkey (Aloutta seniculus)
lizzards
crocodile
tigers - usually the small, red one (Relis concolor)
two-toed sloth (Chloepus)
three-toed sloth (Bradypus)
all birds

walking through the forest is always on the lookout for casual protein. The smallest bird egg, an embryonic bird, or what have you, are saved and consumed.

The more intensive food quest for the larger animals is aided by the introduction of rifles. A few dilapidated shotguns were in use by Upper Barama River Caribs in 1932-33 (Gillin 1936:8). Currently, only a limited number of men own rifles and ammunition is not always available. As a consequence, the local technology of hunting, including bow and arrows and traps as described by Gillin (1936:3-9), is maintained.

The fish poisons described by Gillin are also in use (1936:11). Rather than the haiari root, the kunami leaves, picked from plants in the fields, are more frequently used around the air strip, where the harvesting of fish has also changed. After repeated poisoning of the nearby streams, only a handful of small fish, three inches and under, are collected in this manner.

With regard to domesticated fauna, there exists the same lack of a specific boundary which characterizes the floral resources. Chickens are clearly domesticated. Currently, they and their eggs are eaten. This is a change from an ornamental use reported by Gillin (1936:45). At one time, a few pigs were raised in the area around the air strip. Scrawny dogs who must scavenge for themselves are kept for hunting. Also, a variety of birds and animals, including the kibihi, armadillo, labba, and bush hog, are captured when infants and kept as pets until they are mature. Then they are eaten. Finally, a honey bee nest may be moved to a location convenient to future use.

*177 657 241 439 654 pounds were received by the Guyana Marketing Corporation in Georgetown. From the sale of this harvest, $90 was returned to Baramita Air Strip and distributed among the ten or twelve men who had worked on the project. By the fall of 1970, a larger project subsidized by the Government was under way. From among the previous miners, ten were paid $4 a day to cut fields, plant, and later harvest crops. One man became discouraged before the harvest, and his field was turned over to another. One large field was cut alongside the air strip. Eight men were each apportioned a strip about seventy-five feet by 500 to 550 feet. Two other miners developed a separate field of about five acres which they worked together. The seeds were given by the Government and had to be returned from the harvest. The sale of the remainder of the crop to the Guyana Marketing Corporation was the farmer's profit. Peanuts and red beans were planted, and families were encouraged to help the men in the fields.

In addition to these specific projects, other Carib men were encouraged to grow cash crops with the government loan of seeds. At first, two men participated. They each planted peanuts. The combined March and April 1971 harvest from all of this subsidized farming amounted to 1416 pounds of peanuts, which sold for $[illegible]1.44, and 374 pounds of red beans, which sold for $88.75. Also, in April and again in May of 1971, rations for cooperative farm projects were introduced at Baramita Air Strip. These rations included wheat flour, vegetable oil, and a mixture of cornmeal, soy bean flour, and powdered milk called bulgar wheat. This food[5] was distributed among about twenty-five men from the Air Strip as well as the satellite settlements where others were cutting fields for cash crops.

*177 657 262